

NEHEMIAH 6:1-14

This is the third chapter in Nehemiah which deals with the issue of opposition to the work of the Lord. In this chapter we are back with the enemies of God's people, who do not give up their efforts to slow down or destroy God's work.

The enemies named are men of influence and power – we can see that from Nehemiah itself (see 13:4 onwards – established connections with the high priests family), and outside sources confirm this. A document from 407 BC refers to Sanballat as governor of Samaria, and the Jewish name Tobiah is from a leading family in Ammon. These were difficult men to stand up against.

We need to remember though that behind these human enemies is Satan who always wants to destroy God's work.

Look up 1 Peter 5:8 and 2 Cor 2:11. Is the devil still opposed to God's people? Are we in the dark as to the strategies he uses to destroy God's work?

TACTIC # 1 – DIALOGUE (Vs 1-4)

At the start of chapter 6 the work is nearly complete – all that needs to be done is for the doors to be hung. It is therefore no surprise that the enemies scale up their opposition to Nehemiah and the work.

The first tactic is subtle, and appears so reasonable. They just want to talk. However Nehemiah knows that is not their aim, and they want to harm him – perhaps physically, certainly by slowing down the work (notice his focus on the work continuing in verse 3).

We need to be careful about applying this – certainly most dialogue and discussion is good and can bear fruit for the gospel. However there are times when it is an unhelpful (dangerous even) distraction from the work we've been called to. This is particularly true of multi faith discussions/conferences that some churches get caught up in, and some ecumenical discussions. When everything is "up for grabs" those discussions can do more harm than good, and take time and effort away from building God's church. However standing strong and saying no can be hard, as the request seems so reasonable.

What do Sanballat and Gersham want? Does this sound reasonable?

What does Nehemiah see that they are doing? Why does he refuse to go?

Can you think of examples where dialoguing with non believers would hinder the work of God?

- What about multi faith discussions (between Christians and Muslims and Hindus and other “faith groups”) or very broad ecumenical discussions (which include Catholics and other vaguely Christian groups)?

TACTIC # 2 – INTIMIDATION (Vs 5-9)

When dialogue fails, the enemies show their true colours and begin spreading outright lies against Nehemiah and the people in Jerusalem - claiming that they are planning to revolt (remember that Jerusalem is still under the control of the Persians). This kind of deliberate maligning of Christians motives has continued down through history (see 1 Peter where Peter tells Christians to submit to governments so they will see that they have no reason to fear the church).

Behind this letter is Satan, the liar and accuser of the church, who continues to use this tactic. Nehemiah’s response is simple – he tells the truth and is not distracted. That is all we are called to do. However, he knows lies can cause great distress, so he also prays for strength.

What does Sanballat accuse Nehemiah of? Why is this such a serious charge?

Look up John 8:44 and Revelation 12:10. How is Satan described? Should this incident in Nehemiah surprise us?

How does Nehemiah respond?

Can you think of situations today where lies are spread about Christians and the church? How should we deal with that?

How does Nehemiah deal with the fear this produces?

TACTIC # 3 – DISCREDITING (Vs 10-14)

In this slightly odd incident the enemies are trying to discredit Nehemiah as a leader by showing he is afraid and not strongly confident in God. This would

have had a devastating effect on Nehemiah's reputation as a leader, and the workers would have crumbled too. However again Nehemiah has discernment to see what is going on. He'd rather die than retreat from God's service.

Leaders have always been Satan's first target. Remember how Paul was continually discredited by people wanting to destroy his apostolic authority. We need to be careful that we don't do Satan's work here. Leaders are not perfect, but we must not spread lies and gossip.

Why do his enemies want Nehemiah to flee to the temple? What would this do to Nehemiah's leadership?

Does the devil still want to discredit Christian leaders? Why does he focus so much on them?

Look up 1 Timothy 5:19-20. What are the safeguards put in place to make sure a leader's reputation is not discredited unjustly?